TWO HUNDRED POEMS FROM THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY

TWO HUNDRED POEMS FROM THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY

Selected and translated by
ROBIN SKELTON

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INTRODUCTION

The Greek Anthology as we now know it is the product of the work of several anthologists. It first achieved something like its present comprehensiveness when Constantine Cephalas compiled an anthology in the tenth century A.D. He made his collection by selecting poems from several older anthologies, the *Wreath (or Stephanus) of Meleager* which was made at the beginning of the first century B.C., the *Wreath of Philippus* which was made in the reign of either Caligula or Nero, and the *Cycle of Agathias* which consisted of work written in the reign of Justinian II when it was compiled. To the poems from these three collections Cephalas added some epigrams copied from stones and by well-known authors, the *Musa Puerilis* of Strato, (a collection of epigrams on homosexual themes), a group of love poems by Rufinus and others, and a group of epigrams by Palladas of Alexandria.

The *Palatine Anthology* was compiled in the middle of the eleventh century A.D. and is a considerably expanded version of the anthology of Cephalas, though it omitted many poems which Cephalas had included.

In the years 1299–1301 Maximus Planudes compiled yet another anthology by expanding the anthology of Cephalas; he included a number of poems omitted from the Palatine Anthology but also left out a number of poems which the Palatine Anthology included.

All these anthologies together form the body of poetry we now commonly refer to as *The Greek Anthology*.

The poems in the Anthology cover a period ranging from 700 B.C. to A.D. 900. The authors were often not born in the territories we now think of as constituting Greece, and many,

indeed, were civil servants and scholars under the Roman Empire; almost all, however, would have considered themselves culturally Greeks and would have spoken Greek as their native language.

The works in the Anthology have been conventionally divided up into several periods. The period from the seventh to the fourth century B.C. is called the Classical Period. These works were written during the great period of the Greek city-states. The second period, from the third to the first century B.C., is known as the Hellenistic or Alexandrian Period; the writers of this time lived in the eastern Mediterranean monarchies that were established after the death of Alexander the Great, states which had all become Roman provinces by the time of Augustus. The period from the first century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. is called the Roman Period, and many of the best poems in the anthology were composed during this period by citizens of the Roman Empire living in many cities of the Mediterranean, Asia Minor, and the Middle East. The last period is called the Byzantine Period and here identifies poems written in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. Constantinople became the eastern capital of the Roman Empire in A.D. 330, but it was not until A.D. 410 that Rome was completely deprived of its cultural eminence by Alaric's sacking of the city. In A.D. 455 Rome was again plundered by the Vandals, and in A.D. 529 the Schools of Athens were closed.

Many commentators see the poets of the Greek Anthology as living within a long post-classical twilight. They mourn the rich variety of the earlier Greek lyrics and deplore the tyranny of the elegiac couplet. Nevertheless, it must be realized that the poets of this twilight recalled the brightness that had gone, and, in imitating it, sometimes outshone it. Of the Greek lyricists of the earlier period (as edited by J. M. Edmonds in *Lyra Graeca*[1]) many show similarities to the later epigrammatists.

[1] London, Heinemann 1952, 3 vols.

When Semonides anticipated Dorothy Parker's famous couplet

Men seldom make passes
at girls who wear glasses

and wrote the verse I translate as,

No man will summon
a thick-ankled woman,

E. 184

he anticipated the work of Lucilius and Lucian as much as that of Miss Parker.

When Solon wrote

No man knows happiness; all men
learn misery who live beneath the sun

E. 14

he was, in spirit, close to Glycon's

Dust, laughter, nothingness; our all
is born of the nonsensical.

X. 124

The moods of the writers of the Greek Anthology were, indeed, very much those of their forebears as well as their own. The sophisticated, perhaps rather decadent, wit of Lucilius can be found also in Theognis:

Breeding stock is a matter of being careful
To get the best beasts matched with the best at stud,
Yet even a sensible man will marry some dreadful
Child of a dreadful man if her bank account's good.

E. 183–86

Of all the earlier poets, however, it is Anacreon who is most clearly godfather to the late epigrammatists. Not only do we find many poems about Anacreon's grave; we also find poems derived from the master. Here is an example from Anacreon of the sardonic gusto which we find in some of the later satirists.

In a cheap shiny suit
frayed grey at the wrists
and a brass signet ring
that sweated green,
he lounged and scratched
round the back streets,
had drinks with pimps
and the cheapest women,
a kicked-around layabout,
Borstal-bred,
shiftless, lecherous,
cunning, dirty,
who now, a dear friend
of Lord Sodd,
sways like a Deb
from party to private party.

E. 97

Perhaps none of the later poets has quite the same savage gaiety or the same acid touch with a portrait, but their intention is similar. The authors of the *Anacreontea* (poems in imitation of Anacreon) were even closer to the Greek anthology writers. The following, in its use of the erotic catalogue, comes close to many of the Amatory epigrams. Indeed there are several poems in the Greek Anthology based upon this particular wish or series of wishes.

If only I were grown your glass
to gaze into your amorous eyes,
or changed into a silken dress
to slide upon your breasts and thighs,
or your perfume to warmly rest
on secret skin and sleep in hair,
or brassiere to cup your breasts
or loop of pearls to tremble there,
or, worshipping the ground you tread,
if I were grown your high-heel shoes,

bruised at each step, I would be glad
of suffering such sweet abuse.
Anacreontea 22

This formula has been used by many poets in many countries of course, and the poets of the Greek Anthology are not alone in finding it attractive. Nevertheless, along with the other examples I have given, it may be taken as indicating the continuity of the Greek Tradition, and the dependence of the poets of the Greek Anthology upon the writers of the great period of the Greek Lyric.

The Greek Anthology that we have today has been quarried many times for many purposes. It formed an important part of the classical schooling of the English public school boy during the nineteenth century. Selections were published for the use of the boys at Westminster and Eton. Between 1806 and 1913 there were no less than twenty-six books of selections published in England. In 1916 W. R. Paton put everybody in his debt by editing the whole anthology for the Loeb Classical Library, basing his text upon those of Dübner, Stadtmüller, and others. Paton's edition is not without its flaws but it is of real importance in that, like its companion texts in the Loeb Classical Library, it brought the actual text, together with adequate prose translations, of important material to a large public.

Paton's edition, printed in five volumes, consists of sixteen books, as do most previous and all subsequent complete editions of the Anthology. Not all these books are of equal interest. Book One consists of Christian epigrams, and many of these are little more than devotional exercises, versified scraps of dogma, and tributes to the dead and the saintly. In mood and tone, if not in technique, they differ from the majority of the poems in the Anthology, and contain little of what I feel to be the 'Greek spirit'. This book is therefore represented by only a few poems in my collection. The second book contains verse descriptions of the bronze statues in the gymnasium at Byzantium; these were

concocted by Christodorus of Thebes in the sixth century A.D. and are conventional, windy, and repetitive. The third book consists of the verses inscribed on a monument at Cyzicus; these are simply comments upon the material presented by the reliefs, and have little but antiquarian value. The fourth book is equally tiresome as it consists of the proems to the various anthologies which Cephalas plundered. These are filled with allusions, rhetorical flourishes, pedanticisms, and complimentary tropes. It is in Paton's fifth book that the Anthology really comes alive; here we have the amatory epigrams which have affected so much later literature; here we see the ancestors of Martial and therefore of many of the poems of Ben Jonson, and of the Cavaliers. Here we detect the source of some of Matthew Prior, and of many of Landor's shorter poems. Here, too, we find what lies behind the lyrics and epigrams of Herrick and many of the lighter lyrics of the English tradition. These are poems which still retain their vitality and point, and which continue to attract and influence the writers of our own time.

The reason for the influence of these poems is not difficult to discover. For one thing, the majority of the writers represented in the Anthology took a most engagingly cavalier attitude towards affairs of the heart. They combined sheer lyrical delight with a sardonic spirit of self-mockery to such excellent effect that masculine sexuality is portrayed with both candour and vigour. It is characteristic of these poems, as it is perhaps of amorous young men in any age, that the predatory and the sentimental are near-neighbours, and passion and absurdity are never far away from each other. Consequently we get the same mixture of the absurd and the passionate that we get in Donne's elegies; the same balance of eroticism and intelligence that we get in Carew; and throughout the book (when it does not lapse into smoke-room scurrility) we receive an impression of men without false shame and without inhibition speaking openly of delights which they practise as openly

as is sensible. There is no sense of sin, though there is a proper appreciation of the follies of over-indulgence. There is no prudery, though there is condemnation of over-indulgence. Drunkenness is regarded with affection and amusement, even though it is also regarded as having dangers. Whores are praised for their abilities as often as they are condemned for their vanity. Infidelity is regarded leniently though not dismissed as of no importance. In fact these sophisticated Greeks of Rome, Byzantium, and Alexandria do not seem to be very unlike many people of our own day. They are, perhaps, similar to the people of any place or period when society is not subject to some form of moral tyranny or religious straitjacket.

The fifth book, therefore, provides a large number of the pieces in this present collection. The sixth book, consisting of the dedicatory epigrams, provides rather fewer. These verses however do give us a picture of one aspect of Greek religious observances. Many of them are spoken by people who, at the end of their lives, dedicate the tools of their trade to some tutelary god, as a token of thanks and of their retirement from the workaday world. Thus the fisherman, grown old, gives up his nets, and the worn-out courtesan her professional finery. The Greeks did not always take such dedications seriously, however, and there are several comic variations upon the theme. Thus Palladas, speaking in the voice of an illiterate soldier unable to recall the proper formula, or even remember the name of his god correctly, declaimed:

Them hats and boots and bits of spears
Sergeant Clodd gives holy Zears.

The dedicatory poems shed more light upon Greek trades and ways of life than many of the poems in the anthology, and they, perhaps predictably, may strike us as being much less sophisticated than the amatory epigrams. The placing of a fisherman's or hunter's gear upon an altar appears to us to derive from a much simpler culture than ours, whereas the complexities and

comedies of love are essentially similar in any culture. Nevertheless, these often simple and sentimental verses reveal, from time to time, a love of the countryside, and an enjoyment of the country life which derives from far more than an affected pastoralism. Indeed, it seems not unlikely that many writers seized upon the formula of dedication in order to write a small pleasantly celebratory poem about life's pleasures and labours, rather than in order to make a whole-hearted religious gesture.

In this book, as in all the books of the Anthology, there is considerable repetition. It seems frequently as if a poet strove to rewrite and improve upon a poem by one of his predecessors, undisturbed by any notion of plagiarism. Thus we find, for example, Lucilius writing in the first century A.D.

John with a needle probed his toe;
his toe went through the needle though.

In the beginning of the second century A.D. Ammianus wrote

John's efforts to extract a thorn
failed miserably. He was so thin
that when the pin approached his foot
it was the foot that pierced the pin.

This kind of repetitiousness is noticeable in all the books in the anthology, and especially in Book Seven which consists of the Sepulchral epigrams. Many of these are no more than inscriptions for gravestones; some, however, are moving reflections upon mortality and unattached to the name of any particular decedent. Nevertheless, the theme of mortality and the accounts of the manner of a person's death soon become wearisome. This book is therefore only slightly represented in my collection, although it is true to say that reflections upon mortality share the honours with reflections upon love as dominating the mood of the whole tradition. The reflections upon mortality, however, do not only occur in Book Seven, and perhaps the most central statement of

the theme occurs in Book Ten where we find Lucian's epigram:

All that mortal man possesses
has mortality and passes;
everything goes hurrying past
or is passed by us at last.

It has been said that the two themes of lyric poetry are Love and Death. In the best poems of the Greek Anthology this is certainly the case. The delights of love are qualified by the remembrance of mortality; the sad contemplation of the grave is ameliorated by the remembrance of joys past. The moral outlook is simple, and perhaps strange to us. We live, love, and laugh a while, and then we descend into the shades; there is no point in fretting too much about it. As Dionysius of Heraclea is reported by Timon to have said:

A time to love,
A time to wed,
A time to lie
long in the bed.

Nevertheless, the nature of a man's existence in Hades is sometimes regarded as dependent upon the quality of his life on earth. The philosopher Diogenes, in an anonymous poem, is stated as laughing among the shades at Croesus, for Croesus must be troubled by thoughts of the treasures he has left behind him, while Diogenes has no such worries. The poems in Book Seven, however, are more conventional than the author of the poem about Diogenes and Croesus and the repetitions become boring.

If Book Seven becomes wearisome at length, Book Eight is tiresome from the start. It consists of the epigrams of Saint Gregory the theologian. The vast majority of these deal with tomb-robbers. The dweller in the tomb complains bitterly of the way in which his remains have been disturbed, or warns passers-by that he has nothing worth stealing. Other epigrams of Saint

Gregory refer to the death of his saintly mother, and are ingenious without being interesting, and pious without being poetical. I have included only three of Saint Gregory' epigrams, most of which appear to be versions of each other. He had perhaps three themes, and he composed 254 epigrams. It is not an inspiring spectacle.

When we turn from Book Eight to Book Nine, however, things improve. The Declamatory epigrams in Book Nine and the Hortatory and Admonitory epigrams in Book Ten include some most charming and incisive poems relating directly to Greek customs. The Declamatory epigrams may be rather too allusive to be easily translatable, but the Admonitory poems frequently have real directness and force.

It is with the Convivial and Satirical epigrams of the eleventh book, however, that we return most obviously to works which have inspired later generations. Some of these satires are crude and violent, and some obscene, but their vitality is indisputable. Though we may find the poems about deformity and about gross physical appetites a little too strong for our twentieth-century stomachs, they were not unacceptable to Ben Jonson or Herrick. Suckling's notorious poem on his deformed mistress is related to these works, as is the viciously sensual satire of some of Rochester and the mordant attack of Swift though the work of Martial probably acted as intermediary in this as in most other cases before 1750. On the whole, however, the satirical poems are as much a part of our world as of the Greeks. Lucilius could as well be writing now as in the first century A.D.

Book Twelve is more difficult for present-day readers to accept as it is devoted to homosexual love poems. These, however, are often vigorous and often charming. Several of them would be completely inoffensive to our day were the sex of the protagonists adjusted a little. Some of these poems have, indeed, suffered such adjustment by previous translators. It is, of course, well known that it was, at various times and in various places in the

long post-Classical period, fashionable to compose verses in praise of beautiful boys, and many of these epigrams have an air of flirtatious delicacy which makes one suspect their origins to lie more in fantasy than fact.

The homosexual love poem is not a genre which has persisted, at least openly, so it may be worthwhile commenting upon the main themes for a moment. The greatest number use the themes of heterosexual erotica: the unwilling mistress, the proud whore, the girl too young for love, the complaining lover; these are all presented in homosexual terms. There are however many poems devoted to the contention that boys are no longer attractive when their pubic hair begins to grow, and there are several which compare heterosexual with homosexual love to the disadvantage of the former. Some of these poems are gross and crudely expressed, but many reveal a delight in the innocence of youth which is, curiously, rarely expressed in the poems about women.

The thirteenth book is composed of metrical exercises; there is little point in translating them, for their themes are better displayed in other parts of the anthology. The fourteenth book is equally unrewarding. It consists of mathematical problems in verse, of riddles, and of oracles. I have translated three of Metrodorus's problems and a couple of the riddles of Socrates simply to illustrate this aspect of the Anthology. The fifteenth book contains miscellaneous poems of all kinds, and the sixteenth is devoted largely to epigrams about sculpture. Most of these merely describe the statue as so well made that it looks alive, and adorn this statement with a series of picturesque exaggerations.

From this brief summary of the contents of the Greek Anthology it can be seen that the Amatory, the Convivial, and the Satiric are most interesting as poems to us today, and that only a minority of the declamatory, dedicatory, and sepulchral poems are more than conventional exercises. It can also be seen, perhaps,

that the Anthology shows the Greek versifiers of the period 700 B.C. to A.D. 900 to have used verse for many reasons, some of them pedagogical and some entertaining. A great many poems are clearly *jeux d'esprit*; many have the air of being made to show that the writer could turn a verse as well as the next man. On the other hand several poets of real quality emerge. My own list of these would include (as my selection implies) Julian of Egypt, Lucilius, Marcus Argentarius, Meleager, Palladas, Paul the Silentiary, Philodemus the Epicurean, Rufinus, and Strato. These, at least, are the poets whom I found most interesting, and in whom I most clearly detected links with the English lyrical and satirical tradition.

In translating these poems I have adopted what might well be called a 'double standard'. In the case of those poems which are informal in tone and uncluttered with allusions, I have deliberately modernized both the names and the diction. These, in fact, might more properly be called 'versions' than translations, for I have not tried to keep too close to the letter of the originals, preferring to make new poems which have as many of the qualities of the old as possible, but which do not necessarily carry precisely the same shades of meaning. Exact translation is often an enemy to the provision of an artistic equivalent. When we read a delightful little love-poem addressed to a girl by a young man in a fit of affection and exuberance, the whole spontaneity is lost if the name of the girl is given as Rhodope. The poem becomes immediately a piece of antiquity instead of a part of our own existence. Consequently, in making these versions I've done my best to use only English proper names. Of course, some proper names have had to remain in the Greek. I could hardly translate *Zeus* into *God* without making a fool of myself, and there are some witty references to Greek myth which I couldn't bear to leave out. On the whole, however, my attempt has been to place these poems in the context of our world, and to make them speak in our accents. This has meant the alteration of much

imagery. In one poem I refer to 'lipstick and eye-shadow' which are, obviously, un-Greek, though the Greeks did use cosmetics and the poem is about that use. In another poem high-heel shoes are substituted for Greek sandals. In yet another I make the Greek Rose-seller an English Chocolate-and-Cigarettes girl; this helped me to imitate the play upon words of the original poem more accurately. We do, nowadays, call girls 'my sweet', but we no longer refer to them, at least ordinarily, as 'roses'. The same wish to imitate the gesture of the original led me in other poems to exchange for the Greek wine the British ale, and to replace Hesiod's *Works and Days* with Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, this last alteration being intended to give the reader a meaningful book-title rather than an esoteric reference, as well as to help me to a play upon words similar to that in the original.

Many poems, however, would suffer too great a transformation if modernized in this fashion. In translating the dedicatory poems, some of the sepulchral poems, and some of the more formal verses, I have therefore sometimes retained the original Greek names, and have allowed myself occasional inversions and a slightly mannered syntax which I felt would 'distance' the poems to the right extent. Thus, in Archias's poem upon Apelles' statue of Cypris I use the word 'thus' which would be inappropriate in a less deliberately graceful compliment, and in Philippus of Thessalonica's dedicatory poem, while modernizing the fisherman's name to Jack, I allowed myself a plethora of picturesque epithets.

In being thus inconsistent I have, I hope, been consistent to one of my intentions, which was to display the variety of the Greek Anthology without ever departing too far from a particular norm. With the exception of the poems in Book Thirteen all the poems are in dactylic elegiac couplets. My own versions are metrically more free, but are all, for the most part, rhymed or near-rhymed, and basically iambic or trochaic. The number of feet in each line may vary, but, if I am allowed to count the

shorter-lined versions as being composed in half-lines, the average works out at tetrameter or pentameter. Iambic and trochaic tetrameter and pentameter are, clearly, the forms central to the English lyric tradition, and most of the previous translators of the epigram have used rhymed quatrains in these metres. Mine is, therefore, a very conservative approach, as regards form. The forms I have used owe less to my conservatism (which is, I think, rather doubtful) than to my conviction that if one is to translate a poem from one language to another one should think in terms of providing an equivalent form, not an imitated one. Most English poets when tackling the kind of subject that is dealt with in these poems have used neatly rhyming short-lined verse. The epigram in English is most frequently presented in the shape of a precisely rhymed quatrain, and the liveliest vernacular is most usually balanced by a strict verse form. In saying this I am, perhaps, thinking back to Ben Jonson, to the Cavaliers, to Prior, or to Landor, rather than thinking of numbers of our modern translators. This is not to suggest that I do not admire the versions of lyrics produced by such scholar-poets as, say, Richmond Lattimore and Dudley Fitts. Mary Barnard's versions of Sappho I think almost miraculous. My own method had to be different, however, for I feel these poems to be more a part of the English lyric tradition, and to be, in particular, a part of that Cavalier strain which, beginning long before the Cavaliers, has always brought a healthy gaiety and a masculine freshness into English poetry. These poems are, to my mind, of the same tribe as the lyrics of Herrick, the ironic witticisms of Carew, and the balanced melodies of Lovelace.

I cannot, of course, pretend that anyone would detect my convictions from my practice. Herricks, Carews, and Lovelaces do not occur twice, and these versions of the twentieth century cannot hope to speak with the accents of the seventeenth. Nevertheless, it is with these ideas in mind that I have made my

versions, and if only a fragment of the gaiety, charm, and strength of the originals comes across perhaps I may be forgiven my malpractices and the writing of this Preface.

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NOTE

Reference to the original poems of the Greek Anthology is made in the usual form (e.g. xii, 119 = Book xii, poem 119).

For the sake of simplicity, all reference to lyrics not contained in the Greek Anthology is made according to the numbering of J. M. Edmonds (e.g. E.74) in his *Lyra Graeca* (London: Heinemann, 1952), 3 volumes, and his *Elegy and Iambus* (London: Heinemann, 1954), 2 volumes.

In preparing this book I have been greatly assisted by the criticism and encouragement of many people. Foremost among these is Dr Peter Smith, the Chairman of the Department of Classics at the University of Victoria. Without his watchful sympathy and friendly advice this book would never have achieved completion.

I am also indebted to the editors of *Arion* who chose to publish half a dozen of my versions in their pages.

R.S.

Addaeus of Macedon

1

John spared his patient labouring ox,
worn out by years and the plough,
the answer of the bloody axe,
and thanked it for its service; now,
somewhere, half-lost in meadow grass,
it lows in soft requited ease,
glad of the respite from the plough,
rejoicing in release.

vi. 228

Ammianus

1

You think that beard has made you wise,
but 'Cut it off' is my advice;
that goatish fly-swat is the cause,
not of your learning, but your lice.

xi. 156

2

John's efforts to extract a thorn
failed miserably. He was so thin
that when the pin approached his foot
it was the foot that pierced the pin.

xi. 102

Ammonides

1

If we had showed them naked Joan
our enemies would all have flown.

xi. 201

Antipater of Sidon

1

Now is the time for seas to tear
before the running of the keel;
no longer do the waves uprear
from glistening angry chasms, while

the swallow underneath the eaves
begins to make her rounded house
and young leaves in the meadows smile;
Sailors, drag your anchors out
from their harbour hideaways
and coil the dripping hawsers in;
haul high the sail: for so commands
Priapus, holy harbour king.

x. 2

2

This is Anacreon's grave. Here lie
the shreds of his exuberant lust,
but hints of perfume linger by
his gravestone still, as if he must
have chosen for his last retreat
a place perpetually on heat.

vii. 30

Antipater of Thessalonica

1

Astrologers foretold to me
I'd live till I was thirty-six,
but I will settle for the three
decades and then be glad to quit;

for thirty years is the proper
limit of our mortal span;
Nestor may have lasted longer,
but he went to Hades then!

ix. 112

2

She's lovely as Europa. For ten bucks
with none to stop you, and no opposition
on her part, but rather the reverse,
you can have her. She's in good condition,
and takes care; her sheets are always clean;
she lights a fire if the day is cool.
A mere ten bucks. There was no reason, Zeus,
to make a thing of it with all that bull!

v. 109

3

When the deep-piled winter snow
melted on her roof, it caved
the timbers in and killed her, but
her neighbours did not make a grave;
they left her in her friendly room,
her tomb her home, her home a tomb.

vii. 402

Antiphilus of Byzantium

1

I took his dripping corpse upon
my dolphin back and reached the strand;
the beast played saviour to the man;
the sea thing saved the thing of land;

the living helped the dead. And yet
it did me little good: I left
the water for the earth and got
my death as payment for my gift

of ferry-service. He and I
changed destinies: my friendly sea
destroyed him who was of the land,
and his earth proved the end of me.

ix. 222

2

Nearing home at last, I said
'Tomorrow this contrary wind
that's battered me so long will drop.
The words had scarcely made their sound

when hell broke loose upon the sea,
and my careless thought had spilled
complete destruction on my head.
Oh, never say 'Tomorrow will . . .'

for Fate observes the smallest thing
and hates the over-sanguine tongue.

vii. 630

3

When she was still an infant, sweet
and innocent, I swore she would
grow up to set the town on heat,
but nobody believed she could.

Now, however, I'm proved right.
Each man that sees her feels the pain,
myself included; love's delight
and hunger ravish me again,

each glimpse of her exites me so;
not seeing her is just as bad; it
hurts all ways, for she says No
and plays the virgin. Chums, we've had it!

V. 111

Archias

1

Not much to look at, I agree!
Yet I, Priapus, lacking feet,
and with a dome for head, set up
on this promontory by the beach,

companion of the wheeling gulls
and creatures of both sea and land,
though crude as any carving made
by fisher boys upon the sand,

fly swifter than the wind when called
to help a man with net or rod,
and know all secrets of the deep:
the character of any god

lies not within the shapes he takes
but in the miracles he makes.

x. 8

2

Apelles surely must have seen
the nursing sea deliver Cypris
to draw her thus, with newmade hands
still wringing water from her tresses.

xvi. 179

Asclepiades

1

Why must you keep your maidenhead
until the bitter end? Once dead,
no man will make your bedsprings groan.

Only the living can have fun.
Die – and what have we become
but lonely heaps of ash and bone?

v. 85

2

It's wonderful to suck ice
in a sweltering summer,
and marvellous after a blizzard
to feel the still
candour of air, but triumphant
when two young lovers
lie under one coat, warm
on an April hill.

v. 169

3

The winter nights are long. The sun
goes down before the stars are born.
I pass, repass, and haunt her door,
drenched, chilled, and shaken by the storm,
and feverish with desire for her,
the cheating bitch; and if I tell
you this is love, I lie – it's more
the madness of a living hell.

v. 189

4

Judith's beauty makes me burn
with longing; it consumes and slays!
You sneer and say her skin is black?
Coals bloom to roses when they blaze!

v. 210

Automedon

1

Yesterday I ate tough mutton
and a cabbage ten days old;
I won't say where I went to dinner,
for my host is of a cold
revengeful temper, and he might
invite me back another night.

xi. 325

2

Each evening when we drink together
we are men; but each new day
we wake and rise to rend each other,
savage, ravening beasts of prey.

xi. 46

Bassus

1

I'll never change myself to gold.
Other fools that want can make
themselves into big-chested bulls,
or swans that honk across the lake.

I leave such tricks to them and Zeus.
Why play at birds when I can see
here in my hand ten willing bucks
to pay Joyce for an entrance fee?

v. 125

2

When the Father of the Shades
saw three hundred newly dead,
all battle-slain, a second time,
'These men are Spartans all' he said.
'Look! Every wound is, as before,
in front, and not a scratch behind.
Great Warriors, cease this thirst for blood,
and learn, with us, the quiet mind.'

ix. 279

Bianor

1

Duck-hunter, seeking reed-beds out,
be very careful! Do not take
the forest paths on naked feet;
avoid the little grey-eyed snakes,

and watch your every step. Look out
in case you, hurrying on your path
to shoot the creatures of the air,
are poisoned by the secret earth.

x. 22

2

In the clear water by the beach
an octopus was swimming, and
a fisherman, who saw it, grabbed
and threw it high upon the land,

afraid his prey might trap him if
he wasn't careful. There it flailed
its tentacles and writhed until
it happened on a timorous wild

half-sleeping hare among the reeds,
and strangled it. Thus, all unplanned,
the fisherman's sea-plunder brought
him further plunder from the land.

ix. 227

Callicter

1

Though Doctor Pillbox never called
to physic me or feel my side,
in bed with fever, I recalled
his name, and died.

xi. 118

Callimachus

1

This stony sepulchre you pass is
now the tomb of Callimachus;
he could sing and he could laugh
while the red wine filled the glasses.

vii. 415

Constantine Cephalas

As I warm to my task of teaching youth
with learned fervour, eagerly I touch
first upon love, for it is love that first
excites a boy to lift the burning torch.

v. 1

Cillactor

1

Girls are a tasty dish, agreed,
but once they ask for money
my taste-bud withers and they seem
more vinegar than honey.

v. 29

2

A girl grows rich, not by her arts
but simply by her natural parts.

v. 45

Crates

1

Hunger puts an end to love,
and if hunger cannot tame
your passion, Time will quickly dowse
the fury of the amorous flame:
if, spite of these, your pains endure,
then suicide's the only cure.

ix. 497

Crinagoras

Whether you toss this way or that in bed,
switch from right side to left, or left to right,
makes little odds, my friend, for if your head
is not beside Estella's through the night
you'll get no proper sleep, but, harassed, worn,
will wake, played out, in an exhausted dawn.

v. 119

Democritus

1

When Cypris, long hair drenched with foam,
rose naked from the vivid tide
she clasped the hair that brushed her cheeks
and with her wringing fingers dried
it of the salt Aegean flood,
revealing openly her breasts,
as women may: if she's this good,
to Hell with Ares' jealous fret!

xvi. 180

Demodocus

1

One time a vicious adder bit
a Cappadocian lout,
and, having merely tasted it,
immediately passed out.
xi. 237

2

Take one, take all –
the Turk's a jerk,
except for Paul,
and Paul's a Turk.
xi. 235

Diogenes Laertius

1

Nor, by God, shall we neglect
to tell how this one died of gout,
however curious it may seem
that he, who used to get about
by using other people's feet,

could suddenly become so well
that in the space of one short night
he scampered all the way to Hell.

vii. 112

Dionysius of Heraclea

1

A time to love,
a time to wed,
a time to lie
long in the bed.

x. 38

Dionysius the Sophist

You, yes you with the chocolates –
You're pretty enough to eat,
yourself! Are you selling yourself,
or the chocolates, or both, my sweet?

v. 81

Dioscorides

1

I'm crazy about those
red murmuring lips
whose kisses drive me wild,
those passionate eyes
beneath the bold dark brows,
those full-curved breasts
that bring delirium –
but I'll be wise:
no names, no pack-drill –
why should I go on
to tell you sniffing dogs
where good meat lies?

v. 56

2

If Julian, when he grows up, gives
the sort of kiss he now hands out,
while still a child, to those he loves,
his mother's doorbell will wear out!

xii. 14

Eratosthenes Scholasticus

1

Herewith drunken William gives
you, Bacchus, this great empty vat.
Thank him warmly, for it is
the only fortune he has got.

vi. 77

Erycius

1

I, the priest of Rhea, long-haired
castrato, Tmolian dancer, whose
high shriek is famed for carrying power,
now, at last, rest from my throes

and give the Great Dark Mother on
the banks of the Sangarius all:
my tambourines, my bone-linked scourge,
my brazen cymbals, and a curl

of my long heavy perfumed hair
in dedication, Holy Rhea.

vi. 234

Evenus of Ascalon

1

Though you gnaw me to the root,
old billy goat, I'll manage fruit
and wine enough to do my bit
when your skinny throat is slit.

ix. 75

Evodus

1

Echo:
mimic,
last sip
of the heard wine,
word's tip.

xvi. 155

Geminus

1

Its plinth alone prevents this bronze
young heifer getting up to go.
Unanchor it and it would run
to join the herd. Just hear it low!
The sculptor made it so alive
that I am sure if one more cow
were yoked beside it, they would both
prove excellent workers at the plough.
ix. 740

Glaucus

There was a time when I could lure
a young lad with a spinning top;
now, however, they ask cash,
and I must sigh and let it drop.
xii. 44

Glycon

1

Dust, laughter, nothingness: our all
is born of the nonsensical.
x. 124

Saint Gregory the Theologian

1

This fisher, netted like a fish,
in being trapped escaped life's mesh.
viii. 158

2

Why do you heave apart my stone?
The feeble dead are all I own;
my wealth is nothing more than bone.
viii. 233

Leave my tomb. Employ your pick
upon your cabbage patch instead,
for I have nothing in my pit
but the watchful angry dead.

viii. 227

Hedylus

Of Drink, that loosener of tongues,
and Love that loosens clothes and thighs,
a child is born: see where she comes,
Miss Gout, loose-limbed until she dies.

xi. 414

Honestus

1

The very day one son was drowned
she lit the other's funeral pyre;
two griefs, two gifts, destroyed her heart,
one given water, and one fire.

ix. 292

Irenaeus Referendarius

Why, Darling, do you bend your head,
look at the floor, and flush, and play
games with your necklace? Nothing's wrong
with making love! If you won't say
'Yes' out aloud, you won't; but why
not drop a hint that I might *try*?

v. 253

Isidorus Scholasticus

1

Now Endymion dedicates
his cold bed's failure to the moon,
for grey hair frosts his ageing head
and all his beauty is long gone.

vi. 58

Julian Antecessor

1

His beard's so thick
I think that Dick'll
give up scissors
for a sickle.

xi. 368

Julian of Egypt

1

Elizabeth delights to make
her men friends crazy with desires
she never satisfies. Just Gods,
give her the fate the case requires –

not death, but dotage – falling hair,
hard wrinkles – for her beauty's made
so many sinful thoughts it's sinned
itself, and ought to be betrayed.

v. 298

2

I often said, and still I say
'Drink up!' Like me, you'll soon be clay.
vii. 32

3

You gave me beauty, Cytherea,
but gradual time has withered me;
now, since your gift is gone, I give
the glass that kept it company.
vi. 19

4

John gives the nymphs this net, for age
no longer has the strength to free
its folds and cast. Feed easy, fish.
Age gives your seas their liberty.
vi. 26

Leonidas of Alexandria

1

We oxen are not only good
at cutting furrows with the plough,

but excellent at hauling ships
up from the sea to land; we know
the oarsman's trade as well as that
of ploughman; therefore, sea, command
your dolphins to be just as deft
and yoke them up to work the land.

ix. 347

2

You send me reams of snowy paper,
and elegant Egyptian pens;
Dionysus, do not offer
poets imperfect gifts again,
but use your head! Consider! Think!
What use are these without some ink?

ix. 350

Leonidas of Tarentum

1

I am a stone on Cretho's head,
and spell his name who shares this earth
with other ashes, who was once
renowned as Gyges for his wealth
and rich with herds of goats – but why
talk further? He whom all thought glad

has now so small a portion of
the countless acres that he had.
vii. 740

2

Jack, the cattle farmer, flayed
the mountain lion that he killed
as it attacked the staggering calf;
no longer can it have its will
with jostling sheep and hurry back
to forest safety. It has paid
the murdered calf in blood for blood
and mourns the outcome of its raid.
vi. 263

3

Myron swears he's carved me, but
the man's a liar; all he's done
is drive me from my grazing herd
and glue me to a base of stone.
ix. 719

Lucian

1

As everyone got stinking, Jack
decided to stay sober,
and all agreed from how he spoke
he must be half seas over.

xi. 429

2

Although the wicked thing you do
may well be hidden from a man, it
can't be hidden from the gods,
though all that you have done is plan it.

x. 27

3

All that mortal man possesses
has mortality and passes;
everything goes hurrying past
or is passed by us at last.

x. 31

4

None has seen the Paphian bare,
but if one did, it was the rare
Praxiteles who sculptured her.

xvi. 163

Lucilius

1

Eye-shadow, lipstick, powder, cream,
mascara, hair-dye, dentures; Grace
has spent so much that it would seem
for less she could have bought a face.

xi. 310

2

Ancient Jane, who's dyed her hair
from white to black, still plays the fool;
she's suddenly so young, we stare,
not on a girl, but on a ghoul.

xi. 69

3

Janine's hired her son a tutor
who's so keen upon his functions
that he stays each night to teach her
new declensions and conjunctions.

xi. 139

4

That raven gloss on Angela's head they swear
was born of Mother Bottle, but they lie;
the colour must be natural, for that hair
was quite the most expensive she could buy.

xi. 68

5

Joan's must be a special mirror
made to beautify and soften;
if it told the truth she'd never
want to gaze in it so often.

xi. 266

6

When migraine troubles Tom he smells
not smelling salts but dollar bills.

xi. 165

7

John with a needle probed his toe;
his toe went through the needle, though.

xi. 308

8

Lazy Larry dreamed one night
he ran a race, and ever after
never slept a wink in case
he dreamed again of running faster.

xi. 277

9

If I for one second think
of Professor Deadwright's grammar,
straight away my tongue grows thick
and I start to spit and stammer.

xi. 138

10

Thin Jimmy, blowing trumpet, blew
so hard he blew himself right through.

xi. 94

11

Though Artist John had twenty sons
he never got a likeness once.

xi. 215

Macedonius the Consul

1

I've got dyspepsia from love;
I ache; I've wind around my heart:
why should it trouble me like this?
Can't it excite a different part?

v. 224

2

'See you tomorrow, then.' Tomorrow,
it is certain, never comes.
Evasions and delays recur.
The host of layabouts and bums
you run around with get your smiles,
your little gifts, your drinks. But I,
who love you, get a cool 'Hello',
a broken promise, and a lie.
'See you this evening, then!' But what
does 'evening' mean to you? I'd gauge
it means not this, not next, year, but
a wrinkled toothless haggard age.

v. 233

Maecius

1

Angela, that cruel bitch
who's never ever gone around
with anyone not filthy rich
appears at last to have reformed.

This is miraculous, if true,
but I can't swallow miracles:
the viper may look gentle, too,
but when it kisses you, it kills.

v. 114

Marcus Argentarius

1

As I read *The Decline and Fall*
Jane wandered into sight and mind;
I slung the book against the wall
and left it fallen and declined.

ix. 161

2

Well, Jim, you once were rich and found
yourself in love; now you are poor,
and Joyce, who loved the very ground
you trod on, visits you no more,
but, out at parties, asks your name
from friends, pretends you've never met.
It's rough – but it's all in the game.
Nothing Have means Nothing Get.

v. 113

3

Take those dark glasses off, Lucille,
They tease too much. And let your hips
roll less provocatively, for
the way that clinging satin slips
and slides on buttocks and on breasts
suggests the nakedness it hides
so clearly that you seem both stripped

and dressed at once. To be so eyed
by all the men may give you kicks,
but if you don't give up I swear
I'll take to clothes like that, half show,
Half hide a thing to make *you* stare!

v. 104

4

You, like your namesake, Bea, love flowers,
and your warm kiss is moist with honey,
but, also, you know how to sting
your lover with demands for money.

v. 32

5

Let go the mooring hawsers, spread
your easy sails, set out to sea,
Captain, for the storms are done
and little breezes laughingly
make oceans gentle as a girl;
already the maternal swallow
moulds its home of mud and straw
with whispering beak, and in the hollow
of the pasture flowers spring;
listen, therefore, to the god
Priapus, and take heart to go
on any voyage you are bid.

x. 4

6

In love with young Elaine, at last
I talked her into it! We played
together, breathless, in my room;
our hearts were thumping, and, afraid
that someone might surprise our love,
we talked in whispers; but we had
been overheard – her Mother's face
poked round the bedroom door and said:
'No cheating, now! Remember, Dear,
We share and share alike round here!'

v. 127

Meleager

1

Dawn, you spoilsport, why on earth
are you so long in coming when
another man's tucked up beneath
Estella's sheet, for, once again,
you were so quick to end the fun
when I embraced her naked there
that, long before we'd really done,
we paled to feel your gleeful stare.

v. 173

2

The claret quivers as it feels
the slow caress of Helen's lips,
those amorous thieves that gently steal
away its lifeblood as she sips,
and makes me envious of the cup
that, for her kisses, drains its bowl;
if only she would take me up,
and, kissing, suck away my soul!

v. 171

3

By Gloria's blonde unravelled hair
that shakes like waters to her passion;
by Helen's breasts that banish sleep;
by Jane's elaborate persuasions;
and by the lamp that for so long
has gaped upon our games, I swear
to you, Love, though I've not much breath
left in my weary bones, I'll spare
you that as well: if you should doubt,
just give the sign – I'll pant it out!

v. 197

4

Helen, who's in love with love,
whose eyes are blue as seas offshore
from Paradise, persuades all men
to ride her depths with dripping oar.

v. 156

5

Love shaped Eve's crimson fingernail
with more than mortal art,
for even its most gentle scratches
rake into my heart.

v. 157

6

Hop away, my little flea,
and take a message to my dear.
Skip into her bed and be
a conscience whispering in her ear.

Murmur someone that adores
her madly, lies awake, that he
is racked with anguish as she snores.
Hop away, my little flea,

But, oh, be careful. Do not shout
in case her husband hears you too,
and finds our little secret out.
You know what jealous husbands do!

But, if you can, persuade my dear
to steal away from him to me.
Suggest it sweetly in her ear.
Be a cunning little flea.

And if she comes, I'll see you get
a great big club, and you shall be
wrapped in a lionskin, my pet;
so hop away, you little flea.

v. 152

7

I'm out of love with Gerald, and
though Julian once burned bright as fire,
he's now a burned-out faggot, so
these days it's women I desire –
For no one but a goatherd feasts
His love upon such hairy beasts!

xii. 41

8

Darkness, wakeful hours that long
for her dear company, then dawn
tormented with remembered tears,
remembered happiness; I turn

in fevered sheets to ponder what
is left of everything we had:
do my kisses still feel warm
upon her in her dreaming bed?

Does she sleep with only tears
for loving company, and slip
her arms around her absent lover,
kissing his imagined lips?

Or has she got another man?
Oh, may this lamp I send her see
no stranger there, but guard her well
and keep her warm and dear for me.

v. 166

9

If I should die, friend, – and I burn
already, and am almost ash
for love of boys – then fill my urn
with claret: let it swirl and splash
until it's drunk before you let
them bed it down. And, when you shove
the wreath on top, write on the stone,
'This present comes to Death from Love'.

xii. 74

10

Why have you left the flower-beds
You busy petal-nuzzling bee,
and settled on Diana's skin?
Do you mean to hint that she

not only is the sweetest girl
but also knows the way to sting
so sharply that it hurts the heart?
If that's the message that you bring,

buzz off, get lost, skedaddle, blow!
Or tell me something I don't know.

v. 163

11

The rose in Janet's hair has shed
its freshness and is almost dead,
but Janet with such beauty glows
the woman now adorns the rose.

v. 143

Metrodorus*

1

John spent a quarter of his life
in boyhood, and a fifth in youth,
a third in manhood, then, grown old,
had thirteen years to wait for death.

xiv. 127

2

Annette, harvesting the apples,
shared them out among the girls;
Janet got a fifth for portion,
Joan a fourth, while little Pearl
took a nineteenth, Jill a tenth;
a twentieth went to Rose-Marie,
but poor Dian got only twelve:
Annette herself decided she
had no necessity for more
than an adequate six score.

xiv. 118

3

There are four taps to the tank.
The first can fill it in a day;
the second takes two days; the third
needs three, the fourth one four: now weigh

The matter up and say how long
the job would take with all taps on.

xiv. 130

**The answers to these arithmetical problems are:*
1. 15 in boyhood, 12 as youth, 20 as man, and 13 as old man, making 60 years altogether.
2. There were 380 apples. 3. Twelve twenty-fifths of a day.

Myrinus

1

When Time was all prepared to drag
that Nancy, that old screaming queer,
off down to Hades, he minced out
and gave Priapus all his gear –
the crimson summer dresses and
the greasy perfumed wig, the pairs
of high heels, and the little box
in which he kept his falsie spares:
he even gave the flute that played
sweet music to his fellow maids.

vi. 254

Nicarchus

1

Does Henry sigh, or does he fart?
His breath's as strong from either part!
xi. 242

2

If blocked, a fart can kill a man;
if let escape, a fart can sing
health-giving songs; farts kill and save:
a fart is powerful as a king.
xi. 395

Palladas

1

Zeus, you're a cold fish
not to alter
into a bull or swan
to mount this creature;

she's as delectable
from head to foot
as ever Danae
welcoming the wet,

or Leda splayed
submissive by her pool,
or even Europa
bold with her big bull.

But I expect
you're too stuck-up to act
on any whore,
however she attracts,

for, after all,
you've never made a pass
at any girl
not virgin, or high-class.

v. 257

2

A woman is a maddening creature
and gives pleasure twice at most,
once when she gives up her virtue,
once when she gives up the ghost.

xi. 381

3

It's wisest for the ignorant chap
to hide his verbiage like a clap.

x. 98

·4

Naked I came,
and naked I return.
Why do I sweat
to fill the naked urn?

x. 58

5

What good do you do anyone
by writing verses, getting cash
for silly slanders, peddling iambs
as a huckster peddles trash?

xi. 291

6

Shakespeare came to Larry's bed
as he lay sleeping still;
'I never did you harm' he said,
'Why do you speak me ill?'

xi. 263

7

Even ants and gnats have spleens.
If these creatures are allowed
their angers, why should I be asked
to patiently accept the loud
attacks of everyone, not ever

answer vicious deeds with seething
words, but gag myself and spend
my lifelong day not even breathing?

x. 49

8

Life is a theatre, a play:
either put your wisdom by
and learn the method to perform,
or bear your suffering patiently.

x. 72

9

Them hats and boots and bits of spears
Sergeant Clodd gives Holy Zears.

vi. 85

10

Money, Money, flattery's father,
product both of pain and care,
it is frightening to possess you,
but agony when you aren't there!

ix. 394

11

Here, beside his statue, Block
is dumb and steady as a rock;
he seems so stony that I itch
to know which marble copies which.

xvi. 317

12

Ponder how your father got you
and abandon vanity!
Plato may have swelled your ego,
babbling 'Immortality',

blathering of a 'Heavenly Plant',
but another voice would cry
'You are nothing but the dust';
yet this is still a pretty lie,

glossing over brutal facts
with rhetoric, for if you face
the truth, you're got by helpless lust
and wetness in a filthy place.

x. 45

Paul the Silentiary

1

While I am kissing Anthony
I can't help thinking of John;
as John enjoys my nakedness
my mind is embracing Tom,
while Tom reminds me of William –
and that's how it goes on!

And why should I feel any shame
in following Venus's example?
Let her condemn who is frigid, plain,
or finds her husband really ample.

v. 232

2

Under her Mother's nose
and avoiding her eye,
she slipped me a pair
of apples; as she pressed
them in my hands, Love rose
and made me curse
two apples in my grip
and not two breasts.

v. 290

3

I had the gorgeous Jacqueline
for company all last night;
she never stopped complaining,
and even before the light
had faded she was blaming
the stars for bringing morning.

Nothing on earth is perfect;
something is always wrong:
girls like that need the North Pole
and a night six months long.

v. 283

4

The fever's done. The fire is out.
I do not burn, but die of cold.
Love's finished me; its greedy heat
has eaten up my blood, and rolled
its lava through my bowels, veins,
and even bones. Now it is done.
The bonfire's out, and nothing's left
but drifting ash upon cold stone.

v. 239

5

Your eyes look bruised and heavy, Dear,
as if still blurred with sleep; your hair
hangs lank and casual; your cheek
is damp and pale; you have an air
of sheer exhaustion. Why is this?
If it's because you've spent all night
in making love, I'd say the man
must surely have explored delight
into delirium; but if
it is frustrated love that's let
you get this way, then don't despair:
I'm willing, and not hard to get.

v. 259

6

I'd rather have your wrinkles, Jane,
than any young girl's peach-bloom cheek,

and rather hold those nodding withered
apples in my hands than take
my pleasure of still ripening breasts
however plump, however firm;
such Springtimes may be delicate
but Autumn fires more fiercely burn,
and, O, your Winter's warmer far
than others' wanton summers are!

v. 258

7

Zeus breached young Danae and her tower
as a golden rain,
and crudely cut her virgin knot.
The moral's pretty plain!

It's money conquers all the time;
it breaks through every wall,
snaps every handcuff, opens every
lock, and, above all,

makes womenfolk submit. Hard cash
brought Danae to her end.
No need to pray, or sigh, or plead
if you've enough to spend.

v. 217

8

One afternoon I found Annette,
that pretty little thing, in bed,
and fast asleep, her naked arms
thrown, like a child's, above her head.

I seized my chance, and boldly slid
beside her, and, to my surprise,
was more than halfway there before
she woke, and with astounded cries
began to pull my hair and thump
with tiny fists my back and head;
she struggled until all was done,
then tearfully lay still and said:

'You brute. You've got your way at last,
although I swore I never should
and wouldn't touch your money. Now
you've had it you will leave for good
and never think of me again,
but find another girl to chase;
by hook or crook you'll share her bed
and have your will, then off you'll race
to someone else and start afresh
without a single twinge of shame,
insatiable! Don't say you won't.
I swear you men are all the same!'

v. 275

9

Joyce's kiss is long and loud,
and Janice's is secret, warm,
while Janey's delicately bites:
judicially I weigh their form
and plan my vote – but where's the point?
Ann's kiss, that honeyed memory, lies
upon my lips. It's useless, girls!
Forget your bribes. Ann gets the prize.

v. 244

10

I'm told that if a mad dog bites
a man, he sees the dog look up
at him from every pool. I see
your face in every brimming cup,
and sea, and river, oh my dear,
in every stream your face alone!
Do you suppose that Love ran mad
before it bit me to the bone?

v. 266

11

'Goodbye' I almost say, but stop
convulsively, and linger still.
I cannot leave you. Parting shakes
my body like the fear of Hell.
Beside you, all is sweetness, light;
without you all the world is night.

v. 241

12

Let's undress, Darling, and lie nude,
each knotted in the other's arms;
let nothing come between us: that
last nylon wisp which veils your charms
to me seems more a wall of stone!
Away with it! Unveil! Unbind!
Come close and kiss! I'll say no more.
I hate loose talk of any kind.

v. 252

15

Why do you sneer at my grey hairs
and bloodshot eyes? You caused these sights –
the scars of unfulfilled desires,
the signatures of sleepless nights!
Yes, and the skin upon my ribs
is wrinkled as it is upon
my scrawny neck. The more I love
the more decrepit I become!
Take pity! Merely whisper 'Yes',
and straightaway my skin will get
its bloom again, my eyes grow bright,
my thick hair cluster black as jet.

v. 264

Perses

1

Ilithyia, Goddess of
perfected children, please accept
the wedding ring and diadem
of Tisis as a thankyou gift
for safe delivery of her son;
throughout her pains she thought of them.

vi. 274

Philippus of Thessalonica

1

Fisher Jack, now bent with age,
his hands grown shaky, dedicates
to Hermes these: his rods, their lines
looped slackly, and his oars that late
swam lithe as fish, his shining hooks
that caught the fishes by the throat,
his lead-fringed nets, his paternoster,
and the gently bobbing floats
that told him where his tackle hung,
his pair of wicker creels, his warm
unfailing lamp, his anchor that
traps wandering ships and holds them firm.

vi. 5

2

I, a ship, built on the profits
from my master's amorous trade,
slide into the sea the Goddess
took as birthplace. He that made
my beauty calls me Courtesan,
for I am kind to one and all;
board me boldly; I don't ask
a lot for passage, and install
most gladly those who wish to come –
natives, aliens, every fellow –
and I ride as well on land
as on the sweet tempestuous billow.

ix. 416

Philodemus

1

I slipped my wary husband's leash
and came to you, although the rain
of midnight drenched me to the skin,
and now, together once again
to talk and lie together, why
do we not talk, and kiss, and lie?

v. 120

2

Commonsense tells me to leave
Estella flat; it knows so well
the jealousies and tantrums that
have in the past made love a hell:
but I can't make it. Though the bitch
herself insists it would be wise,
she does so as our bodies touch,
and warns with kisses and with sighs.

v. 24

3

Jane is petite, a neat brunette,
her small head piled with glistening curls,
her white skin smooth, her pouting breasts
both firm and soft; the darling girl

grants every joy a man can have,
is glad at each small gift I get her:
Gods, may I always keep her love –
or, leastways, till I get a better.

v. 121

4

I fell in love with a cute blonde called Ann
At Whitstable – there's nothing odd in that;
but then another Ann in London took
my fancy – nothing yet to wonder at;
but Ann of Leeds was next, and that seemed strange;
and then the fourth that let me act the man
was Ann as well: by name and nature both
I'm Andrew – I've been always drawn to Ann.

v. 115

5

At sixty, Juliette's mass of hair
is black as it has ever been;
she needs no brassiere to uplift
and firm her marble breasts; her skin
is still unwrinkled, perfumed, quick
to welcome and provoke desire:
so, if you're bold enough to face
love's fiercest, most enduring fire,
call Juliette, and have no fears –
you'll soon forget those sixty years!

v. 13

6

Jim gives his Barbara twenty bucks
just for the once, yet is afraid
and shakes with guilt. I give Ginette
a single Five; for that she's laid
a good round dozen times, and she's
the prettier girl, and doesn't care
a jot who knows what games we play.
Now, do you think I'm nuts to swear
Jim's one of those whose future life
would gain from the castrating knife?

v. 126

Plato

1

Here's an apple. If you love me,
take it, girl, and then take me.
If you don't – well, take the apple.
Beauty withers. Wait and see!

v. 80

2

I, Lois, who have laughed and loved,
throw out my mirror now, because
I hate the woman I've become,
and cannot find the girl I was.

vi. 1

3

This jasper brooch
is carved with five
small grazing cows
so much alive
you'd think that they
would scamper hence
if there were not
that golden fence.

ix. 747

4

I am a sailor's tomb, and this
a ploughman's. Friends, consider well
how under land and sea alike
exists egalitarian Hell.

vii. 265

5

Some aver there are nine Muses.
They should count again.
Sappho on the Isle of Lesbos
makes the number ten.

ix. 506

Posidippus

Don't think you kid me, Janice, with those tears.
I know the score. You love me most of all
so long as we're in bed together here.
Once you're with someone else my stock will fall.
v. 186

Rufinus

1

Alone at last with lovely Anne,
I whispered as I stroked her knee
that there was nothing left in life
if she would not give in to me;
I was so eloquent she cried,
and I felt eased of every doubt,
but when I murmured, 'Oh, my Bride!'
she dried her eyes, and threw me out.
v. 66

2

At the Beauty Contest, Marion, Janice,
and Estelle, showed all that they had got,
with smiles of promise; craftier than Paris
I played for safety, crowned the blooming lot!
v. 36

3

If only feminine attractions
could survive concluded actions,
no man ever would require
varying prospects to desire!

Unhappily, it is the law
that, once they've bedded, women bore.

v. 77

4

Those two hookers, Sal and Annie,
always drifting round the docks,
are extremely dangerous, sonny;
don't be misled by their looks!
Though they're trim and freshly painted,
pointed prow and bobbing stern
are traps for sailors; if you board them
you will either drown or burn!

v. 44

5

Admit I warned you, Helen. 'Soon enough
we'll age, and love decay and fail', I said,
'a net of wrinkles pursing up your mouth,
and hair as grey as ash upon your head.'

And so, My Dear, who trembles for your kiss
and aches for more, or pleads to take you home
through clinging twilight, now your beauty is
as pocked and weathered as a graveyard stone?

v. 21

6

Who is responsible for this?
A girl thrown out into the street
without a stitch! Excuse me, Miss,
but he must be a fool to treat
a lovely girl like you that way!
Did he discover you in bed
with someone else? All women play
that trick at times. Don't hang your head.
It's quite the usual thing, my sweet;
so next time that he takes a trip
and you are tempted, don't retreat
and let the chance of pleasure slip,
but use your head as well: before
you start, make sure you've locked the door.

v. 41

7

Cynthia prides herself upon
the beauty of her face and figure,
and when I meet her gives the frown
a Lady gives a loathsome beggar;
my gifts of flowers go in the bin;
my notes are burned; may age, unkind
with aches and wrinkles, quickly bring
vain Cynthia cause to change her mind.

v. 92

8

Why aren't you, Belle, the girl you've always been, –
stepped straight out of a glossy magazine,
with swinging hips, bold make-up, bolder eyes,
and cool disdainful poise? Cut down to size,
your body's thickened now, your face gone coarse –
it is the usual fate for stuck-up whores!

v. 27

9

She was fifteen and lived next door; she sent
me crazy for her; she would smile and tease
and give a little cry each time I took
a chance and slid my hand above her knees.
But who respects a blush? She felt some pain,
but I was careful not to be too rough,
and we succeeded. Now she's two months gone,
so should I face the music or clear off?

v. 75

10

When you take a woman, choose
to have one that is neither plump
nor slender; averages are best –
the first will wear you to a stump,
the second hurt you with her sharp
protruding bones. In love, I guess,
it's as in other matters: neither
starve nor suffer from excess!

v. 37

11

I hate a girl that's easy meat;
prudes also I avoid and hate:
the one says 'yes' before I've asked;
the others wait till it's too late.

v. 42

12

Her eyes are filled with hazel light;
her skin is soft; her lips are moist
and crimson as a rose; her neck
is pearly as her heaving breasts,
those Goddess breasts! What if, among
her hair that's raven as the night
a little thistledown has blown?
I would not care if it were white

v. 48

13

Time has not withered you; in age
your shining apples, your moist rose,
retain that beauty that has burned
more hearts to ashes than it knows.

v. 62

14

They say I've turned from chasing boys
to being crazy for the girls,
from natural bloom and naked skin
to lipstick, powder, rouge, and curls.
Yes, there are dolphins in the trees,
and stags find pasture in the seas.

v. 19

15

Two Paphians, Four Graces, and
Ten Muses – that is my account,
for Julia, being Paphian, Grace,
and Muse, makes up the full amount.

v. 95

Satyrus

1

Echo, tongueless, sings her sweet
and mimic song in sheep-strewn meadows,
taking up the words of birds
and making her own songs their shadows.

xvi. 153

Socrates*

1

Look at me, and I look back;
you have eyes, but I have none;
you may speak, but I am speechless
for my moving lips are dumb.

xiv. 56

2

Though I am black, my father's white;
a wingless bird, I fly from sight;
to every pupil I teach a tear,
and at my birth I turn to air.

xiv. 5

* *The solutions to these two riddles are: 1. A Mirror, 2. Smoke*

Statyllius Flaccus

1

I am a shaded lamp, a gift
from Anthony to Dorothy

beside whose shaking bed I lift
a flame that almost dies to see
her indiscriminate affairs,
while he that called us both his own
so recently, like me burns out,
but disregarded and alone.

v. 5

2

At last, on Julian's peach-bloom cheek
that turned from lovers in disgust
the hairs are sprouting, and he's fallen
for a boy! The Fates are just!

xii. 12

Strato

1

Though in the street I take good care
never to openly admire
an approaching boy, or stare
into his face, the old desire
grips me still; once he's gone by
I turn and glut my hungry eye.

xii. 227

2

As you lean, you press that splendid bottom
warmly against the cold chill of the wall;
My Darling Boy, why offer that temptation
to mere stone that can't respond at all?

xii. 213

3

When a boy gains my affection
and I kiss him, I detest
angry words of protestation,
struggling hands and thumping fists,

but a boy that, once within my
arms, is eager for his fate
and straightway ready to abandon
every shame, I also hate,

preferring one that knows the way to
give himself and not to give,
restrained yet passionate, neither shamed
nor too inflamed by acts of love.

xii. 200

4

My Darling Boy, if you feel it was wrong
of me to kiss you, if I've caused you pain,
then punish me as I deserve; inflict
the same abuse, and kiss me back again.

xii. 188

5

I swore I'd never breathe a single
syllable of what he said,
not even tell it to myself,
but hidden joy's as good as dead,
and I must shout it out aloud,
no matter what. *He said I could!*
What point is there in having luck
if no-one knows it's any good?

xii. 179

6

Sex and booze don't last for ever;
once we're boxed the fun is through;
so, each day till we're dug under,
Darling let us drink and screw.
Let's live it up until there's doubt
if even Hell can dry us out!

xi. 19

7

Julian, when I said Goodnight,
kissed me – or was it a dream?
The rest is clear enough, alright, –
our talk, his questions, where we'd been –
but, did he kiss me? Was it real?
I can't be certain. If he did,
why am I walking in the street
who, surely, have become a god?

xii. 177

8

Those pretty boys in pretty clothes,
My Dear, won't heed our smiles or words;
the highest peaches on the tree,
they're strictly for the wasps and birds!

xii. 185

9

My neighbour's tender little boy
teases with flirtatious laughter,
hinting willingness; though young,
it's clear he knows what I am after,
and the green fruit swells unguarded;
but, when ripe and fit for plucking,
there'll be barbed wire, dogs, and fences,
and a jealous gardener looking!

xii. 205

10

As Adrian's naked bottom pressed
that wooden bench, it pinched his cheeks;
I tremble to love such a boy
that even wood desires and tweaks.

xii. 15

11

Though on his cheeks fine down is curling,
and other, crisper hairs have reared,

I swear I'll never leave my darling,
however marred by hairs or beard.

xii. 10

12

You've made a hook and caught me, boy!
Poor fish, I'm done! Tug, tease, and play
me as you will, I'm yours: you'll lose
me only if you run away.

xii. 241

13

Say Yes, say Yes, and take my cash!
Already wealthy? Then you are
benign enough, I hope, to press
your favours on the naked poor. . . .

xii. 214

14

Were you still innocent, I wouldn't mind;
I'd sympathise, for you might well suppose
the business formidable, be afraid:
but really, Darling, since the whole world knows

your rich friend's taught you everything, and paid
you well for it, and that you are proficient,
even adept, why refuse me what
he takes indifferently? There is sufficient

reason, surely! Pushed out of his bed
once you've been used, so he can get to sleep,
you're played with and not loved. Come home with me
and what a different company you'll keep!

We'll game together, walk together, talk
as equals, and what else we do we'll do
from mutual wishes; no more love to order!
Though, of course, I'll pay you for it, too!!

xii. 211

15

You laugh, laugh, laugh, and never say
a single word. How do I stand it?
I plead. You laugh. I plead again,
and get no answer. I demand it.
beg it, weep. . . . You cruel lout,
there's nothing here to laugh about!

xii. 218

Theodoridas

1

The hunting stars disturbed the sea
which vomited upon the rocks
this hideous thousand-footed beast
whose giant rib the Masters of
the equally huge galleys lodge
here in homage to the gods.

vi. 222

The Emperor Trajan

With gaping mouth and monstrous nose
should you face the moving sun,
finally you'll be of use
to tell the time to everyone.

xi. 418

Diodorus Zonas

Give this right hand a foaming pot
fired from the dark life-giving clay
we come from, and, when we are not,
lie under till the Judgement Day.

xi. 43

Anonymous

1

I fell in love. I kissed. And she
required no compelling.
But who am I? And who is she?
I tell you, I'm not telling!

v. 51

2

When your melons began to grow round
you let nobody touch them;
when they were big and ripe
you ignored my desire;
but now they are losing their shape
and starting to wither,
you'd put them in anyone's hands
that cares to enquire.

v. 304

3

If you have ever glimpsed a boy
whose tender bloom stands out among
his playmates, radiant and supreme,
then you've discovered Jonathan.

And if at that first startling glance
you were not stricken to the bone
and flushed with feverish passion, you
must either be a god, or stone.

xii. 151

4

Grab every chance; all things decline.
You see a handsome kid. You dote.
And yet one summer is enough
to change him to a shaggy goat!

xi. 51

5

Hold your noise, you silly birds!
Why do you chatter so, as I
curl warmly here beside my boy?
Be quiet, Nightingales, and try
a little sleep among those boughs.
You *giggling* women, hold your noise!

xii. 136

6

Whether I find you blonde or black,
brunette or redhead, every day
your young head troubles me with love,
as it will still when you are grey.

v. 26

7

I wish I were a nodding rose
for you to watch me bud and blow,
and pluck me with that slender hand,
and press me to your breasts of snow.

v. 84

8

Estella, that expensive whore
that has the whole town by the tail,
whose very breath means dollar bills
to those who venture to the sale,

slept with me naked in my dreams
the other night until the dawn,
and gave herself to me for free!
Now I don't have to stand her scorn

or face frustration. She comes cheap.
I only need to fall asleep!

v. 2

9

Dionysus, once again
you stagger from the sacred flame
in glistening bronze to bless our earth,
for Myro's wrought your second birth.

xvi. 257

10

Do not ridicule the small.
Little things can charm us all.
Eros was not big at all.

ix. 784

11

Traveller, if you pass by
Anacreon's grave I hope you'll stop
and pour a little wine, for all
my life I liked to take a drop.

vii. 28

12

A mere three dozen years of time
was all I got, but why protest?
At least I ended in my prime
and even Nestor died at last.

vii. 157

13

When Cypris once in Cnidus viewed
the Cypris there she blushed and hid
her face and cried 'Whenever did
Praxiteles surprise me nude?'

xvi. 162

14

Diogenes, among the shades,
his wise old age completed, saw
Croesus, laughed aloud, then spread
his tattered cloak upon the floor
beside the king who'd grabbed so much
good river gold, and said 'I win!
For I've brought with me all I had,
and, Croesus, you lack everything!'

ix. 145

15

The dead are vomited by Hell;
the flesh of Christ has purged it well.

i. 111

16

Son of God and Light of Light,
take this jade and corallite;
Son of God and of a Maid,
gifts of corallite and jade.

i. 116

17

This cattle shed is Heaven now,
or greater far than Heaven, for
the whole of Heaven was the work
of this child huddled in the straw.

i. 38

18

For angels and for men one song,
for God and Man are now as one.

i. 39

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